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THE PIONEERS OF MACON COUNTY.

BY N. M. BAKER.

During the reign of King James the First of England, a colony consisting mostly of Scotch Presbyterians, though with a sprinkling of Highlanders and of English, was planted in Ulster, Ireland. These people intermarried with each other and to some extent with the native Irish; so that the Scotch-Irishman as known to history is a blend of the Scotch, English, and Irish blood, with the Scotch predominating. These colonists multiplied rapidly in Ireland, and emigrated in large numbers to America during the Colonial period, Philadelphia being their principal port of entry. As the pioneers of Macon County were almost exclusively of this stock, it becomes a matter of interest to learn the route of their travel and the different stages of the journey. I can illustrate both of these points by my own ancestors. About the year 1759 my great-grandfather, John Martin, who had just escaped from a long captivity among the Indians, was living in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, with his wife and small son, Josiah. In 1780 this same John Martin was living in Lincoln County, North Carolina, while his son Josiah, then of military age, was fighting the British and the Tories along the Catawba and Broad rivers, and at the battle of the Cowpens. John Martin died in North Carolina, but in 1812 we find his son, Josiah Martin, my grandfather, comfortably established in Rutherford County, Tennessee, with a family of two sons and six daughters. Josiah died in Tennessee; but in 1828 two of his daughters, my mother and my aunt, with their husbands of the same Scotch-Irish stock, reached the Ward Settlement, in Macon County, Illinois, and in the spring of 1829 they built what I believe to have been the first cabins in what is now Long Creek Township. Here they lived and died at a good old age; but their descendants have already followed the Star of Em-

pire westward to the Pacific coast, and even beyond to Honolulu.

And as this John Martin found his way from Pennsylvania to North Carolina, so many others during the Colonial period drifted from Pennsylvania and other colonies to the Carolinas and Virginia. They concentrated in Mecklenburg County, and are said to have issued a Declaration of Independence preceding the immortal document of 1776. They did not seek the flat lands of the coast, but rather the back country. They were the hill men, the sturdy fighters that kept the field as a forlorn hope under Marion and Sumter, after Charleston was captured and the Carolinas over run by Tarleton and Ferguson. These were the backwoodsmen that gathered at the call of the Colonels and fought the battle of King's Mountain. And it was the sons of these same men that enabled Jackson to defeat the British at New Orleans on the eighth of January 1815,—Jackson, who was himself a Scotch-Irishman, illustrating in his own character some of the best, as well as some of the worst, tendencies of that stubborn stock. The line of emigration, then, was, during the Colonial period, from Pennsylvania and the neighboring colonies to the Carolinas and Virginia, and after the Revolution from Virginia and the Carolinas into Tennessee and Kentucky and Georgia, and later from all these states to Illinois.

As late as 1840 there were very few people in Macon County who were not from the South. Out of 189 persons who were here before 1840, whose records it has been possible to trace, forty-five were born in Kentucky, thirty-one in Tennessee, thirty in Virginia, twenty-five in North Carolina, seventeen in South Carolina, eleven in Ohio, seven in Maryland, five in Connecticut, three in New York, three in Indiana, three in Pennsylvania, two in New Hampshire, two in Alabama, one in Massachusetts, one in Georgia, two in Ireland and one in England. Of these 189 it will be seen that 158 were from the South. It has only been possible to trace the route by which ninety-one of these reached Macon County. Seventy of the ninety-one came by what may be called the Carolina-Tennessee-Kentucky route.

These people were pioneers almost by instinct, at least through the inheritance from several generations of pioneer-

ing ancestors. They were a homogeneous people, having the same aspirations and ideals. They were very democratic. There was a greater equality of condition at the first than ever has been since or ever will be again. Nobody was better off than his neighbor. True, some men brought more money with them than others, and so could enter more land if they wanted it; but the land-hunger of most of them was satisfied when they had secured from 80 to 160 or 300 acres, for land was the cheapest and most abundant thing there was, and why should a man want more of it than he could make use of? Few had imagination enough to look forward and see the country filled up and fenced as it is today. Most of the pioneers believed that there would be plenty of free pasturage on Government land in the prairies for ever and ever, amen. Neither was it necessary to cultivate many acres. The stock ran wild in the woods and prairie from spring till the snow flew in the fall, and it did not take much grain to feed all the stock necessary for family use through the winter. And why should anyone try to raise much more? For a good many years there was no market, no chance to sell either stock or grain except to supply the needs of new settlers; and these did not come in a flood, neither did they bring much money with them.

I do not know that the hardships of the first settlers have been exaggerated but they have been set out in undue proportion. The real pioneers had more leisure than we, their sons and grandsons, have today. The head of the family built his house with his own hands, it is true, but it did not take him as long to do it as it does to get a house built now. To be sure, there was not at the first a foot of sawed lumber in it, but neither was there in the house of his neighbor, so he had the comfort of being in the fashion. After the few acres of corn were laid by, the wheat-patch harvested and tramped out, and the flax in the flax-pen, there was little more to do during the glorious months of the fall but to hunt and fish and visit the neighbors, and attend camp-meetings if religiously inclined; and horse-races and shooting-matches furnished plenty of excitement for those who were not. In the winter there was little to do but to keep wood cut to supply the all-consuming open fireplaces, and to get in the small acreage of

splendid corn, which, followed the southern custom, was supposed to be of course a winter job till the big snow kept nearly the whole crop buried till spring, and suggested the wisdom of an earlier harvesting.

The first settlers had little money, and a good part of what they handled was of French coinage. The five franc piece passed for a dollar, though it was well known that it lacked five cents of being worth a dollar. But it was not the custom to be exact in making change. To be within a few cents of it was near enough; indeed, to have insisted on payment to the last penny would not have been good form, it simply was not done.

These first settlers also brought with them the southern custom of doing business on credit, so far as they had any business to do. As soon as there was a sparse fringe of cabins along the edges of the timber, an enterprising huckster with a good span of horses and a two-story wagon bed traveled long distances, making up a load of beeswax, tallow, hides, furs, and live chickens, taking at the same time orders for sugar, tea, coffee, and spices. The load was driven to St. Louis, the groceries hauled back, and when the man made his round for a second load he distributed the groceries in payment for the first load. The same system was followed in the sale of hogs, as soon as there were hogs enough in the country to make a drove. By agreement those from each settlement would be driven by their owners to a designated place. The buyer would be there with a pair of steelyards. Each hog would be swung up separately in a sort of leather breeching, and the steelyard was balanced as accurately as the kicking, struggling, and squealing of the frightened pig would permit. Indeed, it is likely that they often got within from fifteen to twenty pounds of the real weight of the hog; but as two dollars and a half per hundred was the top price, fifteen or twenty pounds one way or the other were not supposed to be worth considering. These separate bunches of hogs were then collected, and the whole drove taken on foot to St. Louis, but nobody expected any pay till the drover got back with the money. This custom was continued without question till one sad day the drover actually returned, (which was a wonder), but without the money! This was a disaster to a good many

people, but a good thing nevertheless, for it put an end once for all to this buying of stock in a wholesale way on credit.

Of course the shooting-matches and horse races of the south were imported with the people. The prize in the shooting-match was usually a fat cow. Each contestant had as many shots as he was willing to pay for. The four highest scorers each took a quarter of the beef, the fifth the hide and tallow, and the sixth the lead cut out of the tree against which the boards containing the marks were set. There was a race track in the river bottom, near the foot of the hill on the west side of the river, just south of the road leading to the bridge at the Spangler Mill place. It was a straight course. The racing horses were the common farm stock. Cows and other animals wagered on these races would be driven to an enclosure and put in charge of a stake-holder before the race, and the loser's contingent honorably turned over to the winner after the judges had declared the result. There was considerable whisky consumed on these occasions, and sometimes there was what would now be called a rough-house. Doubtless the whisky was good so far as whisky can be good, for it was home-made, like nearly everything else. There was a "still-house" near a little spring on the east side of the river, about halfway between the Cowford and Spangler bridges, and the distiller was a genuine Kentuckian who advertised his own liquor by being a liberal consumer of the same.

There is an old saying that if a Scotchman who is religiously inclined is set down in a new place anywhere in the world, his first aspiration is for a church and his second for a schoolhouse near by it; and this is still characteristic of a Scotchman even though modified by a sojourn in Ireland. Many, if not most, of the Scotch-Irish of Virginia and the Carolinas were Presbyterians by inheritance, and that of the straightest sect, but during their stay in Tennessee and Kentucky they were mightily stirred by the historic revival of 1800. Some of their ministers broke away from the old hard doctrines of election and reprobation, preached free-will and a salvation offered in the same sense to every man, and they also encouraged displays of emotion that, according to the old standards, were not seemly. There were ecclesiastical difficulties, the heresy hunter was abroad, and as a result an

independent Presbyterian Church was organized in 1810, prefixing the word Cumberland as a distinguishing mark because they were in the Cumberland country. So it was this modified Presbyterianism that came to Macon County with the pioneers from Tennessee and Kentucky.

We have a striking example of the influence of personality in the fact that the first settler often fixed many of the characteristics of the neighborhood, moral and social, for years to come. The spaces were very wide and empty; people of similar feelings and faiths and practices were inclined to draw together for mutual encouragement and support. And so the country churches as they exist in this county today are mostly monuments to the religious faith and upright living of the men and women who first settled there. This is equally true as at Mt. Zion, where a village has grown up about a country church. The Ward settlement was a mixed community, part Baptists and part Cumberland Presbyterians, and so there is a Baptist church and a Presbyterian church there today. The Methodists concentrated about Mt. Giliad, Long Creek, and the village of Decatur; the followers of Alexander Campbell near Harristown and at Antioch and the Cumberland Presbyterians at Mt. Zion, Bethlehem, Madison, North Fork, and Friend's Creek. There are living congregations of these denominations at all these places today, except that the Mt. Giliad church has been moved to Elwin and the Friend's Creek church to Argenta. Of course the prefix Cumberland has been dropped from these Presbyterian churches since the reunion with the mother church in 1906.

The Methodists and Cumberland Presbyterians brought with them not only their denominational faiths, but also one of the agencies which had had a large part in adding to their numbers in Kentucky and Tennessee. The pioneers maintained five camp-grounds in Macon County; one at Mt. Giliad for the Methodists, and for the Cumberland Presbyterians at Mt. Zion, Bethlehem, North Fork, and Friend's Creek. These camp-grounds were permanent, the camps remaining and occupied by the same families from year to year. When the set time arrived the people of the community left their homes on Friday morning and took possession of their camps. All

business was forgotten, and during Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday, services were held day and night. Usually after a short service Tuesday morning camp was broken, and the people returned home, though often when the interest seemed to require it the meeting was continued over another Sunday. These camp meetings supplied a real gospel need. The people lived so far apart that they could not attend a series of meetings and return home between services. The only chance for a protracted meeting was to come to the ground and stay there till the meetings closed, and people did come from twenty miles or more; some in covered wagons, in which case they lodged themselves in and under the wagon, and many others on horseback, trusting to the hospitality of the campers. Pasturage and grain were provided for the horses, and everybody was fed and lodged. All this entertainment was free as the air of heaven, as free as the gospel that was being preached; and be it said to the honor of the pioneers, of all religious and of no religion at all, that this lavish hospitality was but little imposed upon, for there were no tramps, no "Weary Willies" in those days. It must not be overlooked that these camp meetings also served a social need. People met who had not seen each other for a year; old acquaintances were renewed and new acquaintances were formed.

We have said that a Scotchman's first aspiration is for a church and his second for a school. It was so in this case. The subscription schools were irregular and unsatisfactory, and even after New England influences succeeded in securing the adoption of the Free School system in this state in 1855, the schools were very poor. How poor, a concrete example will illustrate. It was the arithmetic class; the problem was in square root, the pupils had failed to solve it. The teacher also failed, and it was put over till the next day. When it came up the second time, no progress having been made, the teacher decided that, though the solution reached was not right, it was near enough right to do, and let it go at that! Faced by these conditions, the good people of Mt. Zion, the real pioneers who were still living taking the lead, determined to establish a school where the Humanities could

be taught. In spirit it was a church school from its inception, though not legally so. A Joint-stock Company was formed, members of all the Cumberland Presbyterian churches in the county taking stock, as did also liberal-minded Methodists and men of no church at all. These stock-holders put up a frame building, advertised the school, employed a Principal; and with the forks and poles of the old Camp-ground arbor still in place on the campus, the first term was opened in the fall of 1856. This frame building was soon burned, and one term of the Academy was taught in the church, while the stock-holders, with commendable energy, were erecting a brick building in place of the frame. Having got the school well under way, the stockholders turned it over as a free gift to the Decatur Presbytery of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and it thus became in law a church school, as it had been in spirit from the first. For sixteen years this school prospered and did a splendid work, drawing its students from Decatur and the surrounding country, from Montgomery and Bond counties, from wherever, in fact, Cumberland Presbyterian churches had been established. So I must claim for the Scotch-Irish pioneers from Kentucky and Tennessee the honor of establishing the very first school in Macon County where the higher mathematics, the sciences, and Latin and Greek were taught.

In Smith's History of Macon County it is asserted that this Academy ultimately failed because of the establishing of Lincoln University, (now Lincoln College) in Logan County. I have never thought so. It ceased to exist because it was no longer needed. Under the Free School law, High Schools were opened in Decatur and in the surrounding towns, offering practically the same courses of study. Mt. Zion Academy had bridged a gap; it had given to at least one generation of the boys and girls of Macon and surrounding counties opportunities that without it they would not have had. It was not killed by Lincoln College, it did not fail in the usual sense of that word. It ceased to function because its work was done, and well done.

Such, then, were the real pioneers, such their habits and customs, such the conditions in Macon County as shaped by

them; and these conditions were but little modified by immigration from any other source till after the railroads were built in 1854. Decatur may have felt the influence of eastern immigration before that time, but the surrounding country hardly at all. After the timber land was taken up, and a strip of prairie a mile or so wide along its edges, things in the country stood stationary for several years, except that the original cabins mostly gave way to hewn log and frame houses. During this period of arrested development, some attempts were made to get the surplus products of the country to a distant market. Emigrants from Norway and Sweden had formed a considerable settlement in Wisconsin, and were in need of milch cows, for home use and to give them a start of domestic stock. Cows that could be bought here for from six to ten dollars could be sold there for thirty or forty dollars. So a considerable drove was collected, and as soon as the grass was sufficiently grown in the spring was started on the long northern journey, grazing by the way. After reaching the Scandinavian settlement, the diminishing drove had to be herded while it was gradually distributed, an animal or two to each individual purchaser. When the young cowboys, who did not wait for the selling of the herd, returned, (they walked all the way), they told wonderful stories of the bull-snakes they had seen, of the Tamarack swamps, and of the half-underground houses covered with sods, a style of architecture quite unknown on this part of the frontier. From the nature of the case, however, this was but a temporary demand and was soon supplied.

The possibilities of the Sangamon river as a water way were also tried. I do not think that it is mentioned either in Smith's history of the county, or in Mrs. Johns' recollections; but at least two flat-boats were built in this county and sent down the Sangamon. One was built near Decatur, and I think it was loaded with bacon by Peddecord and Armstrong. The other was built near Spangler's mill and freighted, I think, with flour and meal and corn in the ear. This seems hardly probable, but my memory will hold it that way. There were no corn shellers then; and besides, I could go now to the place on the river bank where the pen was built and the corn

hauled and stored in it, waiting to be loaded when a sufficient rise in the river should enable the boat to start on its downstream journey. I infer that these efforts to reach a market by water met with difficulties and were not very profitable; at least they do not seem to have been repeated.

The railroads, The Great Western, now the Wabash, and the Illinois Central, and the Free School law of this state came into operation at about the same time. Either alone would have changed conditions, both together produced something of an upheaval. People began to come in of a different stock, with different habits and different standards. Pennsylvania, during the Colonial period, was the goal not only of the Scotch-Irish; it also received a large contingent from the Palatinate and the neighboring Duchies and principalities of Germany. These at first were mostly of the persecuted sects, dissenters from the established church,—Mennonites, Brethern of the Unity, and various others. Later, but still in the Colonial period, there was a considerable influx of adherents of the Lutheran and German Reformed churches. Some of these people remained and prospered in Pennsylvania, some found their way into the Shenandoah valley of Virginia, and from there to Ohio. Between 1854 and 1860 they came to this county in considerable numbers, bringing with them their traditional love of the soil, their habits of thrift and industry, the Lutheran church, and also some of the dissenting sects that had their origin in Europe and that have persisted with little change since the Thirty Years War,—the Amish, the Dunkards, and the United Brethern, formed in this country by a union of two German sects. The names of the ministers of these churches at any roll call would clearly indicate the German ancestry of most of them. This was a very valuable addition to the population of the county, and all the more so because the most of them located their homes according to individual choice, without any attempt to draw together in colonies or to maintain their own language, and so were readily absorbed into the general citizenship. Some exception to this must be made in the case of the Dunkards, or Church of the Brethern, who have formed a considerable settlement in the northeastern part of the county, and retain

their peculiarities of dress and their attitude of passive submission to, rather than active support of, the civil government. Also, a number of families came direct from Germany about 1853, and settled near together in what is now Blue Mound township. They organized a German Methodist Church which is still supported by their descendants, and the services in this church have been continuously held in the German language till the late war made the use of German unpopular. Another line of German immigration into the county was along the Illinois Central railroad. This road, in its construction through this part of the country, employed mainly German workmen, many of whom remained and became permanent residents of the county. The same, I think, is true of the Irish, who were employed in building the Great Western road, now the Wabash. Few of these settled in the country districts, but Decatur owes many of its Irish families to this source. During these same years, many people from new England and other Eastern states found their way into Macon County, but we have but one "Yankee Colony." In 1858 a dozen or more families from New Hampshire settled in Illini township, bringing the Congregational church, a bit of the New England atmosphere, and the New England thrift along with them.

This inflow of population stimulated business everywhere. The vast bodies of government land in the prairies, that had found no takers at a dollar and a quarter an acre, had fallen to the Illinois Central railroad, and were being rapidly taken up from it on easy terms, but at a largely increased price. This prairie land was being quickly put under the plow, and frame houses and little groves began to dot what had been for ages the treeless prairies. There was also an increased activity along the edges of the timber. The pioneers found it worthwhile to increase their cultivated acres, not so much from the example of the new comers, though doubtless that had its influence, but because there was now a market. What they did not need they could sell. There was more money in circulation, and barter and credit as the way of ordinary business mostly went out together. Even the old settlers began to receive and to pay the last penny in the settlement of a debt without protest!

The rich prairie lands, and the prospect of business in the thriving stations on the railroads, were the lures that brought most of this new immigration; but this was not all. School districts were being formed, and schoolhouses were being built, and the young men and young women of New England were prompt to come in and take possession. As a rule these were not experienced teachers. Many of them were narrow and provincial in their New Englandisms. Anybody from the east was supposed to be able to teach a western school. The scholars they found were many of them young man and young women, anything over six and under twenty-one; these young people were also narrow and provincial and proud, and not to be patronized by anybody. This brought two different civilizations, or at least two social orders, into very close personal relations, sometimes with surprising results. On first contact, it was apparent that teacher and pupils spoke different dialects of the English language. It had a queer sound, and each felt that the difference was a fault in the other that ought to be corrected. It is impossible to speak in general terms of the various points of view that had to be adjusted, but here is an illustration. A young teacher from New England was standing with some of the larger boys on the playground in front of a country schoolhouse, when he suddenly asked, "Boys, what town is this?" The boys looked at him in astonishment, then the one who first found his tongue answered, "Town? Why, this isn't any town at all, it's the country!" Which was very obvious. To the boys it seemed that the teacher had asked a foolish question; to the teacher, the boys had seemed to give a foolish answer. Each knew the institutions of his own home county, but neither was broad enough to realize that those same institutions did not necessarily prevail everywhere else. The teacher was thinking of the town as a political entity, the basis of one form of county government. But as we at that time had never had that sort of local government, and did not adopt it till 1860, the only idea the boys had of a town was a collection of houses. And so in many things the self assurance of these teachers as well as of these scholars had to be toned down a little. But there were good teachers as well as

poor ones, and as time went on the difference between Yankee or Southern or native born became less noticeable, or at least was less noticed. We were growing into something like a homogenous people when the fires of the Civil War quickly burned out all distinctions as to place of birth, and threw the people into the new alignments of loyal or disloyal, Union League or Knight of the Golden Circle.

I will not attempt to tell the story of the developments during and since the Civil War, or the effect on conditions in the county of the arrival from Southern Europe of Greeks, Italians, Slovaks, and Lithuanians. Indeed, the processes of the melting-pot have not yet gone far enough to assure us as to what the result will be. It may be worth while to devote a little time to the question that has been raised, whether Eastern or Southern men have had most influence in moulding the county into that which it now is.

Among the men of energy and public spirit who have started enterprises that have been profitable to themselves and beneficial to the public, some were from New York, some from Pennsylvania, some from Ohio, and some from Virginia and the South. Jasper Peddecord, who started the first reliable bank in Decatur, was born in Maryland, and his assistant, Lowber Burrows, was from New England. The second reliable bank was founded by James Millikin, from Pennsylvania, and his partner, Jerome R. Gorin, was born in Kentucky. So the honors here seem to be even. The only man, so far as I know, who ever went to the United States Senate from this county, Richard J. Oglesby, was born in Kentucky. Of the five men from this county who rose to be Generals during the Civil War, two, Oglesby and Isaac Pugh, were born in Kentucky. G. A. Smith was born in Pennsylvania, and Jesse H. Moore in Illinois, but both of southern parentage; and the fifth, Herman Lieb, in Switzerland. As to beneficial improvements in the county outside of Decatur, the proprietor of Spangler's water mill was born in Pennsylvania. This mill was built about 1840. I have failed to learn when Maffit's mill was built, or from whence the Maffits came. The first threshing machine brought into the eastern part of

the county was operated by John Bell, who was born in Tennessee. This machine threshed the grain, but the chaff and straw had to be separated by hand afterward. This must have been about 1846. The second thresher was run by a man named Malson, from Kentucky. It cleaned as well as threshed the grain, but the wheat was fed to it with such extreme care and caution that it took all day to thresh one hundred bushels. This, however, was a great accomplishment compared with tramping it out with horses and cleaning it with a hand-power fanning mill. This same man ran a circular saw-mill with the same horse-power that ran the thresher, the first circular saw, I think, at least on the east side of the river. In these local matters that bettered conditions in the county, men born in the south and in the east seem to have had well nigh an equal share.

But I cannot say as much as to those larger benefits that have come to this county in common with the other counties of the state, through acts of Congress and the State Legislature. Macon County is not far from the northern limit of the territory which was overflowed by this early invasion from the south. The real pioneers of the northern part of the state were mostly from the east; and besides this, all through the southern part of Illinois there were professional men from the east, especially lawyers, who were active politicians and frequently rose to prominence and positions of influence. Lincoln and Douglas, one born in the south, the other in the east, were rivals in Illinois for many years. Lincoln attained the higher office, but before that time Douglas exerted more influence over legislation than he. To Douglas we largely owe the land-grant that secured the building of the Illinois Central railroad, to the great benefit of the county. The prime mover in securing the acts of Congress which made possible the establishing of agricultural colleges in this and other states was Jonathan B. Turner, an eastern man. The division of the county into towns for purposes of local self government came from New England, though in this case it had to be adopted by a majority vote of the people, to which they were not persuaded until some years after the legislature had passed the enabling act. And the whole idea of the Free

School system as we now have it, bears all the marks of eastern rather than southern influence. In these larger things, then, I must conclude, though with some degree of reluctance, that the influence of eastern men had predominated. But let it never be forgotten that so far as Macon County is concerned, the pavers of the way, the tamers of the wilderness, the real pioneers, were of Scotch-Irish blood, the descendants of the men who rescued the Carolinas from the grasp of the British, and to a great extent made Yorktown possible.